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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: PTER PREL SP

SUBJECT: SPAIN TERRORISM UPDATE: MARCH 11 TERRORISTS BLOW THEMSELVES UP; ETA LEADERS CAPTURED

Summary

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¶11. (SBU) Three weeks after the March 11 terror train bomb attacks, terrorism and the police fight against it continue to dominate the Spanish political and media landscape. In recent days, the police scored two successes: tracking down the suspected leaders of the March 11 attacks to a Madrid suburb and, on the ETA front, working with French police to capture three prominent ETA members and an ETA arsenal in France. The dramatic shoot-out and the suicide of five Islamist terrorists April 3 stunned Spain. End Summary.

Five Terrorists Kill Themselves After Shoot-out with Police

¶12. (SBU) Thanks to the tracing of cell phone information, police tracked the presumed leaders of the terror cell responsible for the March 11 terrorist train bombings to an apartment complex in Leganes, a populous Madrid suburb, on April 3. The terrorists opened fire as police approached.

After a two-hour standoff, the terrorists blew themselves up as a SWAT team (known as GEO) began to move on the apartment. The front wall of the apartment was blown out.

¶13. (SBU) The shoot out and the terrorists' decision to blow themselves up, while chanting "God is Great," stunned Spain. According to the police, five terrorists were killed, although one of the bodies was so badly mutilated that it has not yet been identified. Acting Interior Minister Angel Acebes announced April 4 that Serhan ben Abdelmajid Fakhet aka "the Tunisian," the presumed leader of the cell that carried out the March 11 terrorist attacks, was among the dead terrorists. On April 5, Acebes said that another of the bodies was that of Jamal Ahmidan aka the "Chino" another presumed cell leader. Judge Juan Del Olmo had put out an international arrest warrant for them April 1. Another of the dead terrorists, Abdennabi Kounjaa, aka Abdullah, had been identified by witnesses as one of those who planted bombs on the trains March 11. The Spanish police GEO team leader was killed in the explosion and three other GEO seriously wounded, although they are in stable condition.

GOMA 2 Explosives Same as Those Used March 11

¶14. (SBU) Acebes said that the explosives the terrorists used April 3, GOMA 2, was the same as that employed in the March 11 train bombings and the same as the explosives that were left on the tracks of the Madrid-Seville AVE train on April 12. The detonators police found in Leganes were also the same as in the other cases. Police said that at least one suicide belt was found on the site, along with at least 10 kg of unexploded GOMA 2. In addition, machine guns found were the same as those displayed in a video the terrorists made claiming credit for the March 11 attacks.

Terrorist Message: Pull Troops Out of Iraq and Afghanistan

¶15. (SBU) The conservative ABC newspaper received a message dated April 3 from a group calling itself the "Ansar al Qaeda in Europe." The note, in Arabic, claimed credit for the March 11 attacks and the April 2 AVE train bombing attempt and pledged more terrorist attacks unless the GOS immediately pulls all Spanish troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. If this is not done, the group promised to turn Spain into a "hell" and to have "blood flowing like rivers." The note threatened: "we have the capacity to attack when and where we want." Some media link the "Tunisian" and "Chino" (above) to Ansar al Qaeda.

Success Against ETA

¶16. (SBU) Overshadowed by the confrontation with the March 11 terror cell members were important successes against ETA April 2. French police, with the support of the Guardia Civil, arrested two ETA leaders and another long-standing ETA member. One of the arrested was Felix Ignacio Esparza, a veteran of over 20 years with ETA, who is believed to have been head of logistics. Police also arrested Felix Lopez de la Calle aka Mobutu, a notorious veteran of 25 years with ETA and a leader (perhaps the top leader) in ETA's military wing.

Police believe the arrest of veteran ETA members represents another sign of ETA's weakness in the face of a police and

judicial offensive meant to destroy the organization's operational effectiveness. The arrests also reflect the depth of current Spanish-French cooperation in the fight against ETA. The arrests led police to one of the largest ETA arsenals uncovered in recent years. It contained automatic weapons, explosives, grenades, detonators, and car bombs.

Three Letter Bombs

17. (SBU) In yet another terror incident, on April 1 Spanish police deactivated three letter bombs. One was destined for Channel 3 TV, another for the conservative newspaper La Razon, and another for the radio network COPE, all located in Madrid. The letters were detected by the postal service and did not arrive at their destinations. Who sent them is unknown, though media speculate that an unidentified anarchist group may have been responsible.

Comment

18. (SBU) As the events above illustrate, Spaniards have had little respite from terrorism since March 11. Police successes against the March 11 terror cell and the ETA members are impressive. However, the presence of Islamist extremists in Madrid ready and willing to commit suicide and determined to kill as many civilians as possible to advance their goals has unsettled Spaniards, as did April 3 images from Iraq of Spanish troops fighting off mobs of angry Shiites in Najaf.

MANZANARES